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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

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DATE: February 28, 1963

11:00 a.m.

White House

SUBJECT: Salinity Problem on Lower Colorado River and  
Transit of Latin Americans Through Mexico

PARTICIPANTS: The President  
Antonio Carrillo Flores, Ambassador of Mexico  
Mr. Ralph Dungan, Special Assistant to the President  
Mr. Sterling J. Cottrell, Acting Assistant Secretary of State  
Mr. Robert M. Sayre, Acting Deputy Director of the Office of  
Caribbean and Mexican Affairs

COPIES TO:

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The Mexican Ambassador called at his request to deliver a letter from the Mexican President on the salinity problem on the lower Colorado River. He said that he wanted first to thank the President for his cooperation in achieving a temporary solution until October 1963. He said that Mexico is anxious to know what measures can be taken before October 1963 to prevent the recurrence of the problem at that time. He noted that Mexico is entering a highly political period and that the Mexicali Valley is one of the few areas in Mexico where the Communists are active. The Mexican Government is concerned that they will use the salinity issue even more to agitate and create political difficulties for the Government.

The President recalled his conversation with President Lopez Mateos on the salinity problem. He said that he had asked the Department of the Interior for its recommendations on an urgent basis and anticipated that he would receive them in a few days. He noted that the two Governments are proceeding satisfactorily on achieving a solution to the Chamizal problem and hoped that we could do the same with the salinity problem. He asked the Ambassador to inform President Lopez Mateos that we will respond to his letter as soon as we have more details on what actions we might be able to take on the salinity problem. He inquired about the progress of the Mexican rehabilitation program for the Mexicali Valley.

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The Mexican Ambassador said that it is included in the Mexican "Plan of Immediate Action" now being studied by an IBRD Mission and an ad hoc committee of the OAS "Nine Wise Men." He said that Mexico realized that a rehabilitation program was necessary even if the salinity issue had not arisen. But he added that the problem in the Mexicali Valley had been made much more difficult for Mexico because of the highly saline water being delivered by the United States.

The President said that he wanted to write President Lopez Mateos in some detail about the serious difficulty which Latin American countries have because of the guerrilla and other type training which Latin Americans are receiving in Cuba. President Betancourt had raised the issue with him and had urged the necessity of a program to control travel to Cuba. The President noted that much of this traffic is through Mexico and he desired to explore with the Mexican President what might be done to help control it. He said that 2,000 Cuban trained agitators each year constituted a serious problem in Latin America especially because many of the Governments had serious internal political problems which these agitators could aggravate.

The Ambassador said he was aware of the problem and the fact that it had been discussed when Assistant Secretary of State Martin was in Mexico in January. He doubted that the traffic through Mexico was as great as suggested because there is only one round trip flight each week by Cubana. Foreign Minister Tello had agreed that Mexico would not grant a transit visa for travel to Cuba to any person from a Latin American country who presented a passport which bore a notation that it was not valid for travel to Cuba. The Ambassador observed that under the Mexican Constitution the Government could prevent persons from entering the country but not leaving. He noted that some other Latin American countries are unwilling to take the political steps to prevent their nationals from traveling to Cuba and Mexico did not want to assume the political responsibility of doing it for them.

The President said the problem would be discussed at the meeting of Presidents in San Jose in March. The Central American countries share Venezuela's concern. He observed that we had the military threat posed by Cuba under control but that the countries in the Hemisphere needed to develop a system to take care of the subversive problem. The United States is developing the facts on the problem and would have concrete suggestions to make for both a multilateral and bilateral approach.

The Ambassador said that his President planned to visit France in March and would discuss trade problems with President de Gualle. The President welcomed the trip because he considered it useful for the Latin Americans to bring their trade problems directly to the attention of the European countries. (President Lopez Mateos will also visit Poland, West Germany, the Netherlands and Yugoslavia).

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